calculating a monetary amount due for the said duration; and receiving said monetary amount due.

The reference identification particulars are typically the identification particulars of stolen vehicles.

A database may be provided in the device for storing reference identification particulars of vehicles and the method may include updating the database periodically with reference identification particulars from the remote station. The method may include communicating the identification particulars in a wireless fashion from the device to the remote station at which the database is located.

The invention is now described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying diagrammatic drawings.

In the drawings,

Figure 1 shows a system or installation, in accordance with the invention, for monitoring the use of zones or parking bays;

Figure 2 shows a schematic representation of a device or remote unit, also in accordance with the invention, of the installation of Figure 1;

Figure 3 shows a schematic block diagram of the remote unit of Figure 2;

Figure 4 shows a schematic circuit diagram of the remote unit of Figure 3;

Figure 5 shows a schematic flow chart of information in the system or installation; and

Figure 6 shows the device or remote unit installed at a parking area including a plurality of parking zones or bays.

Referring to the drawings, reference numeral 10 generally indicates an installation or system, in accordance with the invention, for monitoring the use of a plurality of parking zones or bays 12 (only a few of which are shown and referenced in the drawings). The installation 10 includes a national control centre 13 which is connected via a communication link 14, e.g. the Internet, to a plurality of base stations 16 (only a few of which are shown in the drawings) which are located in various parts of the country e.g. in various suburbs, shopping centres, or the like. Each base station 16 is remotely connected to a plurality of portable remote units 18 via a conventional cellular telephone network 20. The parking bays 12 are arranged in groups, each group being associated with a specific portable remote unit 18 which is allocated to a supervisor (not shown) who, with the aid of the portable remote unit 18, monitors the use of the parking bays 12 as described in more detail below. In other embodiments of the invention, the remote units 18 communicate with the base stations 16 using conventional RF transceivers (not shown).

The national control centre 13 is linked to NATIS via a digital communication link, e.g. the Internet, so that reference identification particulars such as the model, make, colour, or registration particulars of vehicles, e.g. stolen vehicles, may be fed into its internal storage means. The national control centre 13 thus includes comprehensive details on vehicles such as stolen vehicles which may then be communicated via the communication link 14 to each base station 16 where the particulars are stored in its internal memory. Each

remote unit 18 includes a memory 22 (see Figures 2 and 3) in which a database of reference identification particulars of vehicles is stored. The reference identification particulars are downloaded from the base station 16 via the conventional cellular telephone network 20 in the form of SMS (Short Message System) messages. During the course of the day if further reference identification particulars e.g. particulars of a vehicle which has been stolen during the course of the day are required, these particulars may be instantaneously downloaded into the memory 22 via the network 20.

The portable remote units 18 include a housing which is water-proof and which is shaped and dimensioned to define a hand-held unit which includes its various components. The remote unit 18 includes a display 24 (see Figures 2 to 4) for displaying various information to the supervisor, as described in more detail below. The remote unit 18 further includes input means in the form of a keypad 26, a warning LED 30, a receipt printer 32, a power supply unit 34 which includes a lithium re-chargeable battery for powering the remote unit, a cellular interface 36 which is operable to receive and transmit data via the conventional cellular telephone network 20, and reading means for reading monetary value from a smart card, a credit card, or the like.

When a driver of a vehicle requiring use of a particular parking zone or bay has parked his car, the supervisor of the group of parking bays in which the specific bay is located approaches the vehicle and, via the keypad 26 of his remote unit 18, enters observed identification particulars of the vehicle into the remote unit 18. The observed identification particulars are typically the registration number of the vehicle and the processor unit 28 then access the memory 22 in